

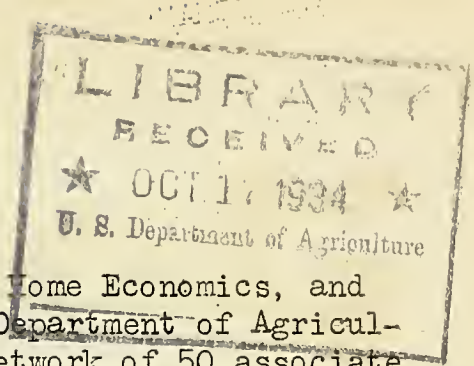
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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Quality Guides in Buying Men's Shirts.



An interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Morse Salisbury, Chief of Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC stations, Tuesday, September 25, 1934.

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SALISBURY:

Well, Miss Van Deman, are you all set for the long-heralded interview on buying men's shirts?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, ready and waiting. Go ahead, fire your questions.

SALISBURY:

Maybe if you knew how many I'm going to fire you wouldn't look so cheerful.

VAN DEMAN:

Maybe not. Remember, though, I'm not afraid to say I don't know.

SALISBURY:

Well, what do you know about this question of shrinkage in shirts? If a neckband shrinks an eighth of an inch, you know, that makes the difference between comfort and discomfort.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I can imagine. Well, I can't vouch for the truth of this, but I've heard that what set textile manufacturers to work seriously on this question of textile shrinkage was the pressure of neckbands on Adam's apples. Men raised such a fuss about shirts that shrank after the first few washings that the manufacturers decided to get busy and use pre-shrunk materials.

SALISBURY:

Sounds plausible, anyway. Well, what I want to know is just what do these labels about shrinkage mean. In the last year or two when I've bought shirts, I've noticed labels that say "pre-shrunk," or "triple-shrunk," or something like that.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I know.

SALISBURY:

I realize from my own experience that the manufacturers have done a lot to shirting to make it shrink less than it used to. But I find that I can't trust these labels implicitly. "Pre-shrunk" on a shirt label doesn't seem to mean that it won't shrink some more.

(over)

VAN DEMAN:

You're right, it doesn't. "Pre-shrunk" and "triple-shrunk" are pretty indefinite terms, when you come to think about them twice. They mean that the fabric has been put through some process to shrink it before it was cut and made into shirts. But that's all. Now if you could find a label that said "Will not shrink more than 2 percent" then you'd have a definite fact you could pin to.

SALISBURY:

Yes, that's an idea. But is it a reasonable thing to ask the manufacturers to do?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, perfectly. In fact, for more than a year now, Miss O'Brien has been going to a series of conferences held by the textile trade on this very question of shrinkage. She tells me that there's a movement on foot to have many kinds of fabrics labeled with the percent that the consumer may expect them to shrink after he buys them.

SALISBURY:

That's hopeful news. But I don't see just why this shrinkage problem should be so difficult. Why should cotton fabrics, for instance, shrink after they are woven?

VAN DEMAN:

Well, now to answer that right, I'd have to give you quite a dissertation on textile manufacture. But to put it very briefly, the shrinkage of textiles goes back to the way they are woven and finished. During these processes the cloth is bound to be stretched more or less, and this puts the yarns and fibers under a certain amount of strain. The first time the cloth goes to the laundry and is thoroughly wet, it begins to spring back to its natural state. Sometimes it takes 3 or 4 launderings to shrink it completely.

SALISBURY:

Then I can't tell by looking at a shirt fabric how much it will shrink?

VAN DEMAN:

No, you can't. But generally speaking, loosely woven, sleazy fabrics tend to shrink more than firmly woven ones. That's why definite labels on shrinkage are so important. And another one is for color fastness. If you buy any colored shirts, look for color-fast labels. To be really color fast, you know, a fabric must stand the sun test as well as the water test and not fade, when it's wet with perspiration.

SALISBURY:

Oh yes, I get the idea. A label that says just "color fast" might or might not mean fast to light, and washing, and perspiration. Now can you tell me this? I have noticed some shirts marked "genuine broadcloth." What does that mean?

VAN DEMAN:

Now you are getting me in deep. For one thing, that's a queer use of the word genuine. When you talk about a genuine diamond or genuine silver or gold, you mean a very definite thing. But who is to say when broadcloth shirting is genuine? There is no set standard for broadcloth, calico, gingham, or any other fabric as far as I know. As generally used, broadcloth means a closely woven material with fine ridges running crosswise. Good quality broadcloth is made from long staple cotton and is mercerized so that it keeps its smooth glossy appearance as long as the fabric lasts. In the last few years broadcloth has been a very popular material for business men's shirts. But percale and oxford cloth are good wearing shirt materials also. By the way, in buying shirts, do you notice the quality of the stitching and the quality of the buttons and buttonholes?

SALISBURY:

I try to, but I admit I slip up sometimes. I've fallen for bargain shirts and then after I'd worn them a few times noticed that the stitching was broken, especially in the yoke across the back. And I'm glad you mentioned buttons and buttonholes. Poor buttons on a shirt certainly are an abomination. They chip and shale right off and simply disappear in the laundry.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, a good shirt for business wear should have good quality pearl buttons -- clear, and lustrous, and uniform in shape and thickness.

SALISBURY:

And seven of them, Miss Van Deman, don't forget that.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I know. Seven does seem to be the magic number of buttons for a man's shirt now.

SALISBURY:

There's a reason. The six-button shirt is likely to gap when it slips up above the belt.

VAN DEMAN:

And to go back to the buttonholes for a moment. A well-worked, firm buttonhole is a mark of quality in a shirt. It won't tear out at the corners.

SALISBURY:

I learned that from bitter experience. And another thing that irks me is to get a shirt that's skimp cut -- narrow through the body and short in the tail so that it keeps riding up from its moorings. How can I avoid that?

VAN DEMAN:

Well, that's another poser. As you know, oftentimes shirts are labeled "full cut" but nobody knows exactly what that means because there is no standard system of sizes for men's shirts or any other garment. However, this "full-cut" label is the manufacturer's way of telling you that he is giving more material than the one who shaves off an inch or two here and there and so cuts his cost. I've been told that by skimp-cutting a manufacturer can get 13 or 14 shirts out of the same number of yards needed to make 12 full-cut garments.

(over)

SALISBURY:

Well, Miss Van Deman, I'm sorry but I'll have to call time on this talk on buying shirts. I haven't asked all my questions and I know you haven't told me all you know. Anyway you've put me wise to the labels on shrinkage, and color fastness. That's a help.

VAN DEMAN:

I'm glad, if it is. Goodbye, Everybody, until next time.

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